

PLAN PROCESS

Plan Process And Community Involvement

Plan Process

The process of revising the Blacksburg 2046 comprehensive plan began in early 2000 by the Town Planning Commission. The Planning Commission determined that the policies in the 1996 plan needed updating to guide the community into the twenty-first century and the new millenium. The goals set for the comprehensive plan update were to create a document that is based on the community's vision of Blacksburg's future. The Planning Commission wanted to complete a document that is user friendly, incorporates all of the amendments to the previous plan, more comprehensive than previous plans, has a direct relationship to the Annual Budget and Capital Improvements Program, is professional in appearance, and on the cutting edge of E-government.

The Long Range Planning Committee (LRPC) of the Planning Commission provided general guidance throughout the plan process. The LRPC is comprised of citizens from diverse backgrounds and interests and includes three planning commissioners, two town council members, and one county planning commissioner. One of the council positions also serves on the Planning Commission. The LRPC provided a variety of input including general policy guidance, strategies for receiving public input, ideas for inclusion in the plan through brainstorming, and review and refinement of plan drafts. The Planning Commission and Town Council also held periodic work sessions to aid in the development of the plan and to provide general policy guidance.

The 2001 plan process began with a review of the community's vision of Blacksburg and an overall evaluation of the future elements expected to shape land use townwide. The *Portrait of Blacksburg in 2046* represents the overall 45-year vision for the town. The remainder of the plan contains detailed analysis and action strategies to help achieve this community vision.

After the vision was reaffirmed and updated, work began on the development of the body of the plan. The plan is divided into two major components. The first section of the plan contains topical layers addressing the town as a whole. These layers provide analysis and action strategies in thirteen chapters divided by topic. The second component divides the town into nine geographic sectors. The sector plans provide analysis and a future land use vision for each of eight

geographic areas of Town, plus a chapter discussing the adjacent areas of the unincorporated county.

The development of the topical layers of the plan began in February 2000 with citizen input at a series of community meetings lasting through June. At each meeting, participants were divided into small groups for discussions, brainstorming, and critiquing the existing plan. Participants identified opportunities and challenges for each topic, and recommended specific actions to address their recommendations and concerns. Draft chapters were developed and presented to the community at a two day 2001 Comprehensive Plan Topics Open House, which was held at the Blacksburg Community Center in November 2000. Citizens were provided an opportunity to thoroughly review work on the plan to date and provide comments and suggestions for its improvement.

Planning sectors were developed using a similar process. A series of community meetings were held from July through October 2000, one for each geographic sector of Town. Participants were divided into small groups by neighborhood planning areas and asked to generate lists of unique characteristics, critical issues, and a future vision for their sector. Draft sector plans and future land use maps were developed and presented for citizen review at the Comprehensive Plan Sector Open House at the Blacksburg Community Center in February 2001.

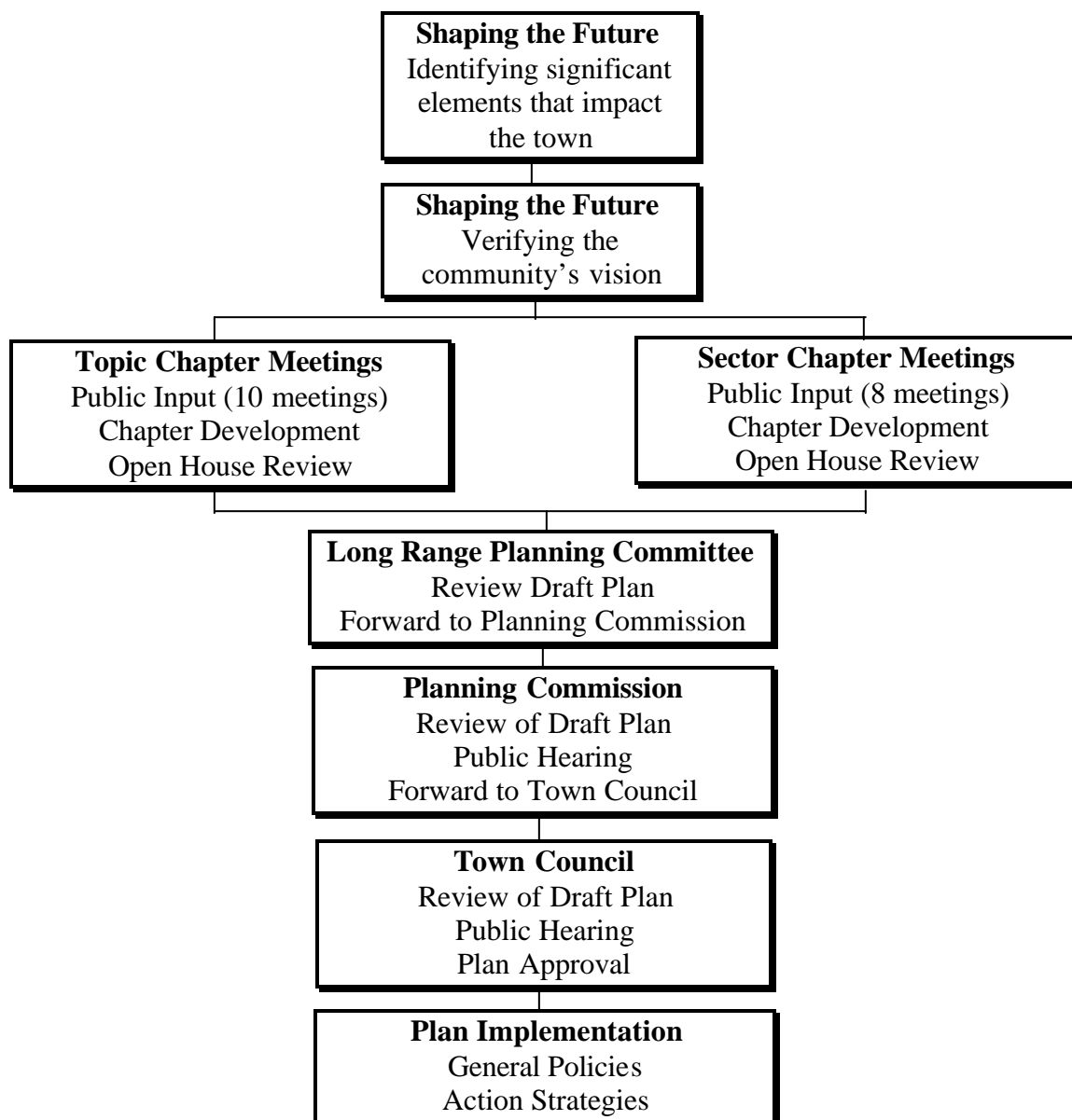
The draft document was reviewed by the Long Range Planning Committee, as well as the Planning Commission and Town Council, at work sessions in the Spring and Summer of 2001. The public hearing and adoption process for the Blacksburg 2046 comprehensive plan began in August 2001 with the draft plan being presented to Town Council. Town Council referred the proposed plan to the Planning Commission who received it and referred it to the Long Range Planning Committee for review. The Long Range Planning Committee recommended approval and forwarded the draft to the Planning Commission. The full Planning Commission held a public hearing and recommended approval of the plan on October 2, 2001 and forwarded the plan to Town Council. Town Council adopted the plan on November 27, 2001.

Community Involvement

Citizen involvement was a key ingredient in the creation of the 1996 Comprehensive Plan. In involving the public in the planning process there were two main goals. The first was to raise citizen awareness of planning in general and in the comprehensive planning process in particular. The second goal was to provide the citizens with the

opportunity to actively participate in the creation of their town's comprehensive plan. A variety of methods were used to inform and educate the public as well as to solicit input. Community involvement opportunities included presentations to numerous community groups, an information booth at the town's annual Steppin' Out festival, an open house at the University Mall, and a comprehensive plan sneak preview at the historic Lyric Theater in downtown Blacksburg. Traditional media were also used throughout the process to solicit participation, including articles, editorials, and paid advertisements in the local newspaper; television broadcasts on the town's public access channel; and public service announcements in the newspaper and on local television and radio stations.

Comprehensive Plan Development Process



The Internet and electronic mail - and the town's web site in particular - have provided exciting new opportunities for interaction and better two-way communication with the community. Information about upcoming meetings and public hearings was posted online and kept current in order to promote public involvement in them. Additionally, draft sections of the comprehensive plan were posted for citizen review, and comments and suggestions could be sent to the planning staff via e-mail.

Youth in a community are typically excluded in participatory processes of government. In order to include students in the planning process, surveys were administered to all Blacksburg middle and high school students in January 2001. The forum provided an opportunity to gain valuable input from area youth as well as a chance for students to learn about the planning process.

Overall, more than 2,500 citizens participated in the development of the Blacksburg 2046 comprehensive plan and many more were made aware of the town's planning activities. Extensive community participation helps to ensure that the resulting document expresses the values and vision that the people of Blacksburg have for their town. The process has also raised awareness of planning in the community and laid the groundwork for increased community involvement in the future.

UPDATING THE PLAN

Annual Implementation Plan

The comprehensive plan will be reviewed annually to track progress on the implementation of the five-year action strategies and to set an annual implementation plan of action for the upcoming year. This process will begin each April and conclude in June to precede the Capital Improvement Program update process. Staff in Town departments and existing citizen committees staffed by those departments will perform the annual evaluation and update. The Long Range Planning Committee of the Planning Commission will oversee the townwide process. The annual review process and implementation plan will consist of the following:

- ◆ Review and report of progress towards the implementation of the Blacksburg 2046 comprehensive plan five-year action strategies.
- ◆ Prioritization of the remaining five-year action strategies for implementation during the upcoming year.
- ◆ Descriptions of whom are responsible for implementation of each action strategy.

- ◆ Descriptions of steps to be taken and expected progress to be made on the action strategies in the upcoming year.
- ◆ Indication of whether items are to be included in the Annual Budget or Capital Improvement Program.
- ◆ Descriptions of measurable indicators that gauge progress toward implementation and that are to be included in the Annual Budget and departmental monthly reports.

This process will result in an annual implementation plan and serve as a guide for projects that are to be included in the Capital Improvement Program and Annual Budget. The process will be repeated annually until the next five-year update of the comprehensive plan.

Five-year Update

Every five years, the comprehensive plan will be reviewed in its entirety, and updated to ensure that it is consistent with the overall community vision. This review will also provide an opportunity to assess changes in the community and to update background data and action strategies. The following is an outline of the general process to be followed by the Planning Commission and Town staff when updating the plan:

- ◆ Gather up to date population, income, employment, and other data to assess trends and compare with projections.
- ◆ Compile progress reports from previous annual implementation plans.
- ◆ Assess progress toward implementation of the action strategies in the current comprehensive plan.
- ◆ Collect and address user comments regarding problems with the previous document.
- ◆ Update existing land use maps and background data to reflect current information.
- ◆ Assess progress towards implementation of sector land use visions.
- ◆ Host a series of community meetings by geographic sector to reaffirm or adjust the long term vision and to address any new issues that have arisen over the past five years.
- ◆ Revise projections and targets as appropriate.

- ◆ Update action strategies by incorporating ones from the previous plan that were not implemented and include new items that have emerged as a result of the review process.
- ◆ Prioritize the new set of action strategies for implementation.

The vision of the plan is intended to remain focused on the year 2046 until the 25-year mid-point. At that time, a vision should be developed for the next 50 years.

Amendment Procedure

Anyone may request amendments to the comprehensive plan. Amendment applications are accepted annually between December 1 and January 2, but not within 12 months of a newly adopted plan. Applicants should meet with Planning and Engineering Department staff before submittal of an application. In order for a comprehensive plan amendment application to be accepted, one or more of the following criteria must be met:

- ◆ The request must be a creative idea or concept that will benefit the community and that was unforeseen during the planning process for the comprehensive plan.
- ◆ The subject property or concept was misinterpreted or overlooked in the comprehensive plan.
- ◆ Conditions have changed substantially since the last comprehensive plan update necessitating a change (e.g., changes in surrounding land use or economic conditions)
- ◆ An undue hardship exists which substantially limits the use of the subject property.
- ◆ The amendment will effectively aid in the implementation of other goals of the comprehensive plan or the community vision.

Amendment applications are considered based on the preceding qualifications. All amendment applications are forwarded to the Long Range Planning Committee for consideration. The Long Range Planning Committee determines which requests will be considered. The Planning Commission will hold a public hearing on the application and provide its recommendation to Town Council. Any amendment considered by Town Council will go through a public hearing process. Council retains the right to initiate an amendment to the comprehensive plan at any time. Any amendment must be determined to be consistent with the goals of the comprehensive plan and the overall community vision.